



Hollow Pike

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

?This book is dedicated to anyone who has ever hated school?, which you might think is an easy bid to get readers on board. Anyone sane could well hate Fulton High School, where new Year 11 student Lis finds the going tough. The teachers are ingratiating or devious, religious nutters or witches; and not many Yorkshire schools have a kind of Wicca as Headteacher. Year 11 are embroiled in Teenwars, hormones seethe around the corridors and Laura Rigg is self-proclaimed Queen of the School. The idiom crackles with ?totallys?, ?cools?, ?hots?, ?babes? and ?muppets?, with the odd ?lesbian?, ?dyke?, or ?gay? tossed in by way of abuse or as a description of contagious diseases. Lessons at Fulton High are incidental to the melodramas of daily life, though it turns out to be handy that the class text is **The Crucible**. Occasionally, someone is said to speak with a broad Yorkshire accent, but the dialogue has no trace of the North. This school is Anytown Comp.

For some 100 pages, this is something of a school soap opera (Mr Dawson is a recent teacher); most readers will know all about self-dramatising struggles for popularity, as well as subtle or full-on bullying. Lis has quit North Wales to escape such victimisation, only to find herself on the receiving end again. She is accepted by the power group, but is soon betrayed and abused again. So she joins up with three friends, seen as ?freaks? by the rest of the Year, but who have an honest quirkiness which Lis welcomes. Even so, the haunting dreams she hoped to leave in Bangor still torment her nights.

Then there is a murder. Everything shifts and the narrative gathers compulsive pace. Some ancient danger lurks in Hollow Pike Copse. A stalker tracks Lis, someone breaks into her home, the villains are hard to spot and violent attack is on the cards. Among all of this, Lis finds distraction with Danny, the likeable ex-geek turned overnight rugby star (really?). It?s love on both sides and all at once, Year 11 style.

There are several genres within one book here ? school story, occult tale (even the page edges are tinged deep purple), murder mystery, *grand guignol* thriller, TeenChickLit. Everything comes together after an enjoyably implausible episode when the Adult Spanish Evening Class turns out to have unusual curriculum objectives, followed by a denouement with strong echoes of Hitchcock, though the killer birds are on the side of the good guys this time. ?We could be the UK?s answer to Forks,? says someone, and you might just wonder whether the author had this ambition in mind. What saves the book, though, is that Dawson can tell a story. The plotting is deft and daring, the humour is fast

and witty in an in-your-face way, the murderer's identity a surprise and we share Lis's final relief. There is no way all of the above should work together, and if you stopped to think, it probably wouldn't; but readers will be too busy turning the pages.

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